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ABSTRACT

The double entry journal, first suggested by Ann Berthoff in "Forming/thinking/writing," offers a way to break out of the one-way discourse and single-voiced thinking that predominates in traditional rhetoric and academic writing. Typically, double-entry journals are set up so that students quote from a source in the left-hand margin and comment on it in the right. In this way, a dialogue of sorts is established between the student and the author. At times, the student may paraphrase and interpret--or as Peter Elbow says, "translate"--the authoritative discourse into more personal, private language--into the internally persuasive word. Bringing into play two voices instead of one, the double-entry journal can also engage students in a critique of discourse. The implications for becoming situated in a discourse become apparent when students paraphrase key phrases from a discourse into "ordinary" or everyday language. In a developmental writing course at Ferris State University, for instance, a special 1993 issue of "Newsweek" devoted to the issue of date rape illustrated how gender relations are constructed by certain key words and phrases. Students read two contrasting articles, one by a conservative feminist and one by a feminist. Then, students were asked to take on the perspective of the subject in the discourse in order to answer the claims made by the discourse. Excerpts from student writing show its effectiveness in assuming and understanding different perspectives. Contains 5 notes and 22 references.) (TB)

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ED 381 796

Two Voices Are Better Than One: A Dialogic Use of the Dialogue Journal

By Faye I. Kuzma

Feminists, such as Sally Miller Gearhart and Helen Cixous, reject traditional argument as violent, masculine, adversarial, and impersonal--calling for a new form, what Gearhart calls the "womanization of rhetoric."[1] While the jury is still out as to whether traditional rhetoric will be eclipsed by other forms, it is interesting to consider how feminist discourse, whether conservative or liberal, has set in motion a cultural dynamic that exerts a powerful influence not only on how we talk but how we think. Literacy--within the context of this cultural dynamic--demands active interrogation of competing discourses.

In the process of making sense of our lives, we contend with the ways others represent reality. Thus, Charles Schuster has written: "Literacy is the way in which we make ourselves meaningful not only to others but through others to ourselves" (227). When we grapple with a discourse up close and personal, we remake it in our own language, merging our own voice with that of the other. Taking the discourse of the other out of what Don Bialostosky, after Mikhail Bakhtin, calls the "distanced zone" and placing it within the "zone of contact" rids it of its formidable authority (17). Allowing for more than one disourse to speak, the dialogue or double-entry journal invites students into the zone of contact.

The double entry journal, first suggested by Ann Berthoff in Forming/thinking/writing, offers a way to break out of the one-way discourse and single-voiced thinking that predominates in traditional rhetoric and

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academic writing. Typically, double-entry journals are set up so that students quote from a source in the left-hand margin and comment on it in the right. In this way, a dialogue of sorts is established between the student and the author.[2] At times, the student may paraphrase and interpret--or as Peter Elbow says, "translate"--the authoritative discourse into more personal, private language--into the internally persuasive word (137). Such intimate association is akin to momentarily taking on the identity suggested by the voice or persona represented by the discourse: coming to know the discourse from the inside out.

At the same time, Don Bialostosky has recommended the double-entry journal be utilized because it positions student writing in relation to the writing of others (17). Isolating key words, phrases and patterns of language, a dialogue journal can break down the wall of discourse, helping students investigate the shared understandings claimed by a discourse.

Bringing into play two voices instead of one, the double-entry journal can also engage students in a critique of discourse. Often, students are only partially aware of how a discourse positions them as receivers of a message or the consequences of assuming the rhetorical register modeled by a discourse. The implications for becoming situated in a discourse become apparent when students paraphrase key phrases from a discourse into "ordinary" or everyday language. Ultimately, the language we use describes who we are.

Since we are simultaneously members of several discourse communities, each claiming our allegiance, we need to sort out in our language the extent of our alignment with certain ideals and causes. Thus, Barbara Henning warns that we ignore at our peril the Bakhtinian understanding that the self is "not a pure member of one unchanging discourse community" (678).[3]

Affiliation with various discourse communities--rather than wholesale allegiance to one--more aptly portrays the social struggle enacted in language. Literacy--in this sense--is much more than a matter of acquiring skills, or correctly deploying the conventions of academic discourse. In a democracy where negotiation is to be valued above party affiliation, literacy also entails sorting out the implications of a discourse.

We might consider the situation of a student entering a prestigious ivy league school. Accepted to a university with long traditions, the student identifies with the conservative institution. Even so, the student is also part of a national discourse community of predominantly liberal-minded college students. Given numerous other such quasi-loyalties, the student at times must consider conflicting allegiances. This might mean merging the authoritative academic discourse that establishes status in an elite university with slang expressions or a lower class vernacular. such a selective use of discourse represents a literate response to a national awareness of equity issues relating to gender, race, and social class.

In the midst of what James Seitz has described as the "fragmentary status of 'communities,'" students are expected to produce unitary texts (821). A tolerance for some brief or more fragmented written responses from students may allow them to use language to to work out the implications of a discourse. This in turn may lead to less totalizing discourse that fails to make distinctions in the interest of commitment to a single goal. The double columns of the dialogue journal enable students to hear the constraints of a given discourse as they experience the roles that discourse assigns both its speakers and those it depicts as the "other."

The student writing I describe here was produced in a first year developmental writing course at Ferris State University. I chose the subject of acquaintance rape as it calls up contested versions of the relations between men and women. Developmental students can deal with difficult issues; in fact, Charles Schuster argues that it is the exclusion from dialogue that most defines illiteracy: "Illiteracy is an outcome of . . . isolation, for, as Bakhtin informs us, 'addressivity, the quality of turning to someone, is a constitutive feature of the utterance; without it the utterance does not and cannot exist'" (231). Anticipating that the issue of acquaintance rape might lead to accusations and defensive posturing, I thus decided against polarized classroom debate in favor of experiencing the role of the subject of a discourse in the double-entry journal.

The current debate over acquaintance rape suggests in what ways gender relationships are subject to social processes of redefinition and challenge. A special 1993 issue of Newsweek, devoted to the issue of date rape, illustrated how gender relations are constructed by certain key words and phrases specific to a discourse community. Students read two articles, one written by feminist Susan Faludi and the other by conservative feminist Mary Matalin. After reading the articles posing contrasting versions of the acquaintance rape issue, my students listed key words and phrases (Bakhtin's reified words) found in the articles. Students first "translated" key phrases into their own language. Afterwards, however, students were asked to take on the perspective of the subject of the discourse in order to answer the claims made by the discourse.

One interesting consequence of using the double-entry journal is that it enabled many students to consider contested versions of the role of the victim of date rape. Even the term "date rape" is contested; and a conservative discourse community might term it "rape crisis mentality" that is part of a "victim mindset," resulting from "feminist-provoked rape hysteria." Significantly, this discourse community includes women, such as Mary Matalin, who consider themselves mainstream feminists. Claiming that the feminist movement is really about economic equality, Matalin dismisses feminists concerned about acquaintance rape as "feminist extremists," "proponents of victimization," and "cultural crackpots" intent on "androgynous equality" (58). Matalin utilizes the key words of a conservative discourse community to distance herself from more radical feminists.

It's interesting to see how students respond to the key phrases of a conservative discourse. Students--whether male or female--tend to separate themselves from the painful experience of the victims of aquaintance rape. No big surprise there. However, the double-entry journal makes it difficult to dismiss entirely the rape victim--the other--as someone who "provoked" or "deserved" to be raped. Because students were asked to answer the claims of the discourse as the subject of the discourse might be expected to answer, they were less quick to stereotype the victim.

Responding to the conservative phrase "rape-crisis mentality," for instance, a male student wrote "I know I would be angry if I was raped." Another wrote: "I don't think you can over-react to an issue like that." For these male students, the double-entry journal did provide a "zone of contact" where they could identify with the position of subject of the discourse--female--even if briefly.

A major goal of the double-entry journal is to encourage the student to critique the language used in discussion of the topic as a way to locate their own voices. It was important that the students not simply mimic the authoritative voice representing a discourse community but take into account those voices in forging their own.

In responding to the phrase "victim mindset," one student acknowledged that rape does in fact occur and added commentary that extends the implications of the discourse: "Rape does happen to people, but there shouldn't be a mindset." (Interestingly, the writer used the generic "people" which seems to acknowledge that men as well as women are victimized by rape). The student does not simply echo the ideology represented by the key phrase or reject it out of hand but negotiates a middle ground where more than one discourse is heard, what Bakhtin refers to as double-voicedness.

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Directions: In the left-hand column, you will find a word or phrase that represents certain values as a community of belief. By that, I mean that the word or phrase entails certain hidden assumptions.

(1) In the space underneath each, spell out what you think some of these hidden assumptions are.

(2) Then, in the column to the right, take on the voice of someone who would not quite agree with the position in order to "answer" the claims inherent in the word or phrase indicated.

1. rape-crisis mentality:

This phrase suggests that those concerned about the issue of date rape are overzealous. These people are depicted as reactionary, angry, and prone to see almost any act as rape-motivated. The phrase suggests the problem is "all in their head," and that feminists have a "chip on their shoulder."

"I know I would be angry if I was raped."

While identifying with the "other" in this way may not entirely get at the truth, it is the first step to full consideration of alternate viewpoints. In this sense, the dialogue journal provides the zone of contact in which the student can address the implications of the discourse and conceive an answer to it.

Making meaning is not simply a matter of finding correspondence between experience and claims made by the other. In Bakhtin's terms, as Helen Rothschild Ewald notes, claims must also answer to ethical responsibilities (339). Interestingly, students responded to the feminist key phrase "rape culture" by holding men accountable not only for their actions but their attitudes:

> "No, rape is not okay. It destroys a woman's self being. Women are human beings and men have to start respecting that"
>
> "Some American men think rape is okay. Not all men do, but they try to take advantage of women."

"I don't see how men think that rape would be okay if they respect any woman in their lives"

The task of answering the feminist claim encouraged these students to formulate a considered, thoughtful position. From a Bakhtinian perspective, all discourse is received; all discourse carries the residue of previous usage. As these students "answered" the claim implicit in the discourse, they were able to contend with prevailing notions.

Bakhtin writes: "One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the other's discourse" (348). This is achieved as the discourse "is put in a new situation in order to expose its weak sides, to get a feel for its boundaries" (348). The double-entry journal can expose the near-sightedness and oversights inherent in any discourse.

Writing always involves more than simply imitating an academic discourse style; it pulls up unaknowledged allegiances; activating these, the double-entry journal can help students make connections between discourses to which they are allied. One male student, for instance, considered the implications for our culture. This student made a connection with discourse aimed at minority students, saying: "It's true, rape happens a lot, but as with the drug culture, this makes it no culture." This shows creative and connected thinking as the student drew from a reserve of internally persuasive language to connect two ideas, framing his comments about rape in the just-say-no discourse of the 90s.

While the dialogue journal does not guarantee that writers will resist the polemical rhetoric of a particular discourse community, it can help students experience the subject position of the "other" that has been concealed by denial and discourse that evades the issue. In this way, students can experience the cultural dynamic within language that motivates social changes.

As with any single method, there is a danger of the double-entry becoming yet another form to fill out, isolated from the act of writing. Students need to make connections between their own personal concerns and the authoritative phrases of diverse discourse communities. The dialogue journal thus needs to place students in the midst of the fray, enabling them to participate in the dialogue of social change writing represents.

There may never be a form of discourse that both men and women are satisfied with. However, as Kate Ronald observes, it may not be necessary to abandon objective authority in favor of more subjective, connected forms of talking and thinking. Referencing the philosopher Michael Polanyi and the work of Mary Belenky, et. al., Ronald suggests that one way out of this male/female dichotomy is to join the two in a form that prizes personal knowing that is allied to more objective and adversarial modes. Ronalds writes: "Writers who 'take it personally' operate somewhere between certainty and speculation, and their authority resides in the tension between objectivity and subjectivity" (36). The double-entry journal offers a contact zone for students to explore the tension between objectivity and subjectivity, certainty and speculation. For an issue such as aquaintance rape, which reads like a barometer of social change, winning the argument may signal a failure to engage in the collective self fashioning writing entails.

Using the double-entry journal with students can call up the complex social context in which all writing takes place. It can encourage students to interrogate the tacit assumptions of discourse. Finally, as students experience the way discourse positions other discourse communities, they may be less prone to mimic unquestioningly the key phrases of a discourse. The double-entry journal is thus a promising starting place for engaging students in the work of considering social conflict. It can open up a safe, provisional space for students--who are in Bakhtin's continual state of becoming--to respond to the discourse of the other.

NOTES:

[1] This paper was initially presented as part of a panel presentation at the 45th Annual convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Nashville, 17 Mar. 1994. Other presenters included Susan Paolicchi and Brenda Vasicek.

[2] Sheree Meyer suggests that in some cases, the dialogue journal may become simply a method for training students to locate details in support of a thesis (59).

[3] Zebrowski points out two limitations of the term discourse community. The first is that writers do not belong to one community (264). Second, when using the term, teachers assume students need only imitate the conventions of a discourse community to gain entrance to that community (265). He suggests that a writer's development may take place as contending loyalties to different discourse communities. Zebrowski also notes that, from a Bakhtinian standpoint, the self is social from the start (panel presentation at the CCCC convention in Nashville, Mar. 17, 1994).

[4] Glen McClish warns "Too often well-intentioned classroom debates over literary, social, political, or economic issues degenerate into mere shouting matches, producing too many bruised egos and too few good papers" (392).

[5] In addition to those mentioned, Matalin's list included "inane political correctness," "overhyped problem," "man-hating extremist notion," and "feminist P.C. police"(58). Faludi's article included such truly dialogic phrases as "attack on so-called victim feminism," "date-rape revisionists," and "male hysteria" (61).

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